A webinar about Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Frank van den Heuvel, May 2024
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Summary: *While Artificial Intelligence (AI) has useful applications there are quite a number of problems that need to be understood and addressed. We need a policy around AI to protect our members and to prevent our communication from being manipulated. And maybe some of us can become part of global and local movements organizing against Digital Capitalism.*
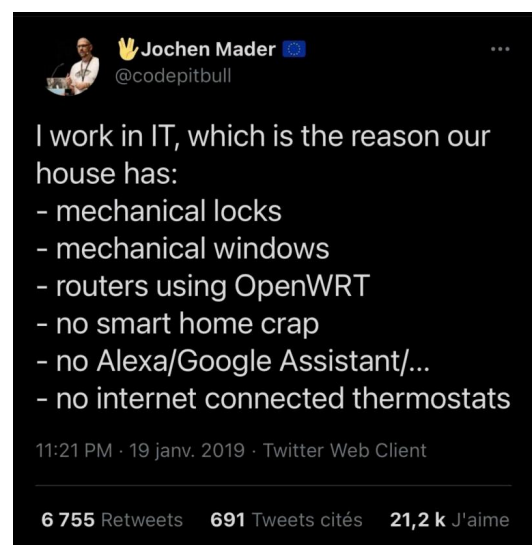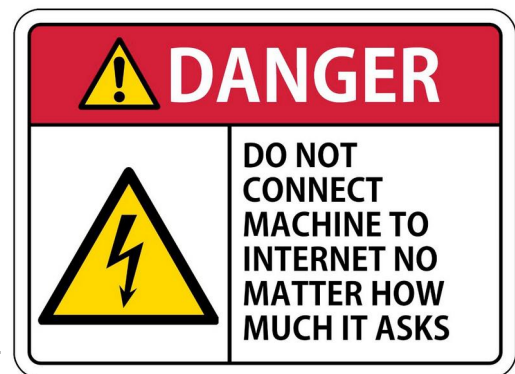
Because Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a huge area to cover, I decided to send all participants this text beforehand. During the webinar we will focus on where we can start discharging about AI and digitization.

First we need to draw up an RC perspective on Artificial Intelligence. Then we can talk about discharging on this subject. This, I think, should then go hand in hand with organizing for better regulations of AI (developments), and policies for the RC community.

AI is just a branch of a much larger tree: Digital Capitalism. This covers all the ways that capitalism has been using digital technology to make profit at the expense of humans, the environment and climate.

Our confusion around technology starts with **accepting things you don't understand**. From the day you were born, in an oppressive system, you were trained to become someone that follows rules. You were trained to respond with known answers to designed questions. You even got punished or ridiculed for not fitting in. All oppressions play major roles in the digital industries, from young peoples oppression to sexism, classism and racism.

It is a growing problem with technology that we are expected to do things we don't understand and give trust to people we do not know, and whose distresses do not deserve to be trusted. During the development of industrial production we learned to make safe products by making many mistakes. Labor movements have played a big role in making production and products more safe. We have gotten used to "product safety". **Product safety guidelines**, regulations and laws allowed us to use things made by people we don't know. But in the on-line world big-tech companies have successfully lobbied against being regulated.

Artificial Intelligence is a misleading term. We have come to know it as a set of technologies that can mimic some of the functions that human intelligence has. However, real **intelligence needs consciousness, emotions and ethics**. Experiencing emotions and empathy is needed to develop intelligence and this is something computers are not capable of. It is very questionable if computers can ever develop such "understanding" without the fine grained tactile and sensory connections that living creatures have.

The Wonky Conker tree with its helping hand in Bideford, Devon.
The 'helping hand' has been keeping the unstable and much loved tree upright for 20 years.

Nobody understands AI well enough to explain its results. Even scientific and commercial developers cannot explain what happens inside. It is a black box, where we are, in the beginning, deeply impressed by the output. But it is in some way similar to seeing your baby roll over for the first time. While your amazement will be encouraging to the baby, computers will not improve by it.

We have a similar experience with machine translations. It is not that the outcomes are useless, but we need to understand the limitations of what AI can and can not do. And how AI can be manipulated.

19th century smart phone users

When using machine translations from one language to another, we seem to accept to skip human judgment. In RC we used to implement the four eyes principle for literature translation. This has always meant there had to be 2 people meticulously looking at the translated text. The four eyes principle for translations remains crucial for reliable transformation of meaning into another language, and also defend against all sorts of possible manipulations. Machine translations are just another tool.

The history of AI goes back to ancient times, with Greek myths about artificial beings built by master craftsmen (like "Talos and the Argonauts"). Thinking about human intelligence has always been formed by human views in that time: via magical thinking, mathematical symbols, to mechanical ideas, until computers came to life in the 1940s. Then also the computer became a model for our **limited understanding of human intelligence**.

Contemporary AI research was founded in 1956. Since then, there has been lots of money available for this kind of research with some interruptions that

are called AI-winter(s). In the last 2 decades there was a new burst of investments and progress because of new technologies and faster computers. New methods came to life when massive amounts of data became available. This is why data collection via web sites and other electronic sources has become so valuable. All **existing oppressions are represented in those data sources**. And AI amplifies oppressions by the way the technology is applied in our current societies.

AI is advertised to us as the next best thing that will solve all problems and make us all rich. They believe it so deeply that **a lot of resource is being thrown** into it. This includes lots of energy, and lots of cheap labor (click workers), and lots of cheap mineral resources. And because investors want profit, a lot of AI-development is aimed at military applications like autonomous weapons (weapons that kill on their own).

A lot of attention has been put into dystopian scenarios where AI will rule humanity. We will have to step out of that film scenario and look at what is real. AI will not 'very soon' kill all of humanity. But AI has become a tool to defeat the redundant, people who don't produce enough, and to make more people redundant. **Under a capitalistic class system, AI is the next step in the attack by the wealthy on the poor, the neglected, and working class people**. Middle class people are very distracted by the (short term) benefits of AI, like efficiency, fast translations, easy access to writing skills (Sound familiar?).

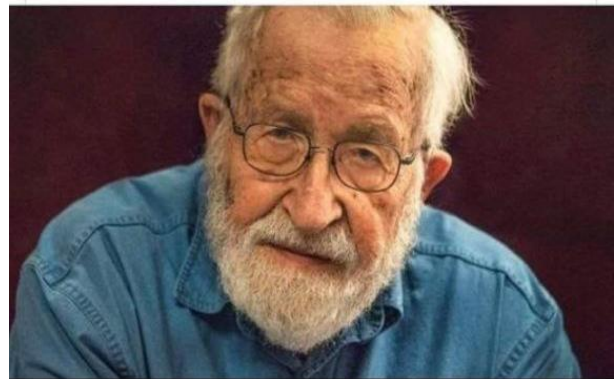*"Can you go through all the old pitch decks and replace the word 'crypto' with 'A.I.'?"*

Almost dystopian but very real are autonomous weapons, that draw a lot of funding and have been tested extensively in current wars (foremost in Africa and Asia). These allow for a disconnection between a decision that is leading to people being killed, and the final execution. Mostly targeting people that are defenseless, and do not attract much empathy from western society. There are horrific examples of how AI identifies potential terrorists and decides to kill them on its own, without a human mind involved in the decision-making. The US and EU have been testing these kind of weapons at least in East-Asia and in Africa and on the US Mexican border.

There is also a mistaken belief that AI systems will be more fair than human judgment. People who have been victim of class justice or racial bias often **hope that an AI-judge would be more fair**. That fairy tail popped when we found that injustice is also embedded in data. Keep in mind that white middle class people are most often not the target of surveillance, predictive policing, fraud detection, or autonomous weapons. So when white middle class people get to decide about implementing AI in the judicial system, they will just see the benefits for themselves and will use their marketing power to sell it as more fair.

To fuel AI, **resources are stolen**. Copyrights are infringed. Privacy is infringed, which is the stealing and abuse of personal data (including meta data = data about you and your data).
Sustainable energy sources are bought up for data ware houses, instead of being used to replace fossil fuels.
Fresh water resources are used up for cooling heated computers. Farming land is used for data ware houses.
Computer hardware is replaced and dumped for faster versions. Opposition against injustice is manipulated to be occupied with controversy. Identity politics is used to keep people fighting for justice, while being divided through social media. AI is increasingly used for manipulation of social media to deepen divisions within society. Creating division in societies is used as warfare, as hostilities, between and within countries (companies are used by state actors to spread fake news).

Noam Chomsky on Artificial Intelligence:
"The human mind is not, like ChatGPT and its ilk, a lumbering statistical engine for pattern matching, gorging on hundreds of terabytes of data and extrapolating the most likely conversational response or most probable answer to a scientific question. On the contrary, the human mind is a surprisingly efficient and even elegant system that operates with small amounts of information; it seeks not to infer brute correlations among data points but to create explanations..."
"... Let's stop calling it "Artificial Intelligence" then and call it for what it is and makes "plagiarism software" because "It doesn't create anything, but copies existing works, of existing artists, modifying them enough to escape copyright laws...."
~ Dr. Noam Chomsky, Dr. Ian Roberts, Dr. Jeffrey Watumull
New York Times, March 8 2023

The current world wide rise of the extreme right is a result of the creation of social media. Social media is operated by upset. Upset draws attention and therefore attracts investors. People driven by a hunger for (pseudo) power invent ways to use this to increase profit. AI is increasingly used as a tool to make this process more efficient. An example if this is shady businesses selling election manipulation in over 200 countries so far (After the Cambridge Analytica scandal).

Fortunately or unfortunately, there are **many ways to approach discharging about AI**. Lots of the work is just basic RC. We will need to empower people's ability to think, and to take charge against the idea that we would just have to accept that we don't know how AI really works. And stand against the idea that everything coming from capitalism is a force of nature.

1. **We have a fundamental right to understand** how things/products/systems work. The working of an AI needs to be understood. We cannot just assume that the outcome is without risk of harm. We also have a right to **know about the resources** that are used by AI. AI should pay a fair price for these resources (similar to fossil subsidies), labor, data, energy, water, rare metals.
2. We probably all need to discharge about our **trust in humans and humanity** and claim it back. Oppressions have damaged our trust. We are disappointed in humanity because of how oppressions have caused societies to be so dysfunctional. We need to find the solutions between humans. It won't come from switching to something we don't know, and don't understand (as AI is), and have not experienced the limitations and risks yet.
Through my deep sense of human connection, I promise to see the good of all humanity.
3. Discharge regarding: **learning and educational change, young peoples oppression, class, sexism, racism, climate change, environmental pollution.** All these need to be addressed in relation to AI, AI-industry, extraction of resources, and AI applications in society. Those people who do NOT bear the negative effects of AI should be extra vigilant about discharging here.
4. Valuing my intelligence. Although a computer can mimic certain features of the human mind, it cannot be compared with my unique personality, unique creativity, unique vision. My brain and my personality are needed to fight the challenges that humanity is facing.
I decide to keep my body, heart and brain fit and healthy. **I promise to value my existence in connection with all life**.
5. I solemnly promise to **prepare for a life without Internet**, which means …

SOMETIMES I THINK THE SUREST SIGN THAT INTELLIGENT LIFE EXISTS ELSEWHERE IN THE UNIVERSE IS THAT NONE OF IT HAS TRIED TO CONTACT US.

The role of AI cannot be seen separate of all ongoing contemporary crises. The inability to address difficulties rising from the development of AI cannot be regarded separate from oppressive societies nor from capitalism. Capitalism is running us into a wall, whether it is changing climate, growing inequality, decline in biodiversity, instable societies, nuclear bombs or the accumulation of faulty data. It is all connected by this same root-problem: capitalism. AI is a fast growing branch in the everything-crisis.

While capitalism is the cause, and we need to keep our eye on the ball. While we must not lose sight of the fact that capitalism is the cause, we also need to address the problems that come from how development and commercialization of AI is done. The first step is empowerment of people to stand up for humanity and demand for regulation (e.g. via labor unions). Another step might be growing already existing movements, like the Electronic Frontier Foundation (www.eff.org) and it's sister

organizations in other countries (like Bits for Freedom in the Netherlands). The movement is there, but they need many more people to understand and support the issues they are addressing.

A commitment to work on Artificial Intelligence:

I joyfully commit myself to the human race.

Through my deep sense of human connection, I promise to see the good in all of humanity.

The preservation of human intelligence and dignity shall be placed above profit and progress for the good of all … including our planet.

I will strive for nothing less than complete benevolence in my interactions with other humans … and all life.

I am proud to be a member of the human race.

And this means …

Some sources (in no particular order):

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